

The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) has completed its review of the following Development of Regional Impact (DRI). This report contains the NEGRC’s assessment of how the proposed project relates to the policies, programs, and projects articulated in the Regional Plan and Regional Resource Plan. Also included is an assessment of likely interjurisdictional impacts resulting from the proposed development, as well as all comments received from identified affected parties and others during the fifteen-day comment period.

The materials presented in this report are purely advisory and under no circumstances should be considered as binding or infringing upon the host jurisdiction’s right to determine for itself the appropriateness of development within its boundaries.

Transmittal of this DRI report officially completes the DRI process. The submitting local government may proceed with whatever final official actions it deems appropriate regarding the proposed project, but it is encouraged to take the materials presented in the DRI report into consideration when rendering its decision.

Project I.D.:	DRI #3657
Name of Project:	Shops of Oconee Crossing
Name of Host Jurisdiction:	Oconee County

Background

DRI review was initiated following the developer’s rezoning request to Oconee County. Potentially affected parties were asked to submit comments on the proposal during the 15-day period of 4/25/22–5/10/22.

Proposed Development

Donald Hammett is proposing construction of a mixed-use commercial development on a 43-acre site at 4501 Monroe Highway (US 78) and Hog Mountain Road (SR 53) in unincorporated Oconee County (parcel number A 02 025HA). The proposed development includes a 48,500 square-foot grocery store, four fast food restaurants, a car wash, two office buildings totaling 20,000 square feet, 152,000 square feet of retail, and one 20,000 square-foot office/retail building. Together, the proposed buildings would total 265,500 square feet. Additionally, the site plan proposes two stormwater management facilities, a pump station, 1,505 new parking spaces, and pedestrian access from the adjoining neighborhood to the grocery store. The developer’s request to Oconee County for rezoning initiated the review. The parcel is currently zoned as “General Business District” (B-1). The developer has requested to rezone the parcel to B-1 and “Highway Business District” (B-2). It is unclear from the submitted site plan which portions of the site would be B-1 and which would be B-2. The project would be completed in one phase with an estimated completion date in July 2024. Currently, the site is undeveloped woodland.

Compatibility with Existing Plans

The site is identified “Civic Center” on the Oconee County Character Areas Map (dated 4/25/2018). Two of the primary land uses identified for this character area include “consumer-based commercial establishments that offer goods and services” and “employment-based business offices.” Grocery stores, restaurants, retail

shopping, and offices are all listed as examples of typical uses for this area. While the proposed land uses and mixed-use nature of this project are consistent with the Civic Center character area, some details of the site plan do not reflect the Comprehensive Plan's Development Strategies for commercial and service development within this character area. The Comprehensive Plan states that "design for each center should be very pedestrian-oriented, with strong, walkable connections between different uses and shared parking areas," but it does not appear that any sidewalks are proposed on the site plan except the one connecting the Oconee Crossing neighborhood with the grocery store. The Comprehensive Plan also states that, for this character area, "large parking areas should be located behind buildings and not along right-of-ways, where possible," but the current proposal shows large parking areas in front of the retail and office facilities instead of behind it. Finally, the Comprehensive Plan states that "Bike-friendly design, including bike lanes, bike racks, and repair stations should be applied, where appropriate, particularly when a residential component is present in or adjacent to the development." Because this development site is adjacent to the Oconee Crossing residential neighborhood, it would be appropriate include some bike-friendly design elements. Rearranging the site to cluster buildings and create a walkable boulevard and adding shaded sidewalks would better provide the pedestrian-friendly design called for by the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, moving large parking areas behind buildings where possible, optimizing shared parking arrangements to minimize surface lot areas, and including bike-friendly amenities are all changes that would help bring the proposed development more in line with the Comprehensive Plan's description of this character area.

The site is identified as "Developing" on the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan's Regional Land Use Map (dated 6/7/2018). The Regional Plan recommends development that matches the region's workforce, prices in the lifecycle cost of infrastructure, creates a sense of place, builds a compact development pattern on existing infrastructure, creates diverse and affordable housing, and complements existing and planned transportation options—especially non-automobile transportation modes. The applicant states that the project can be staffed with the region's existing workforce, but it is unclear whether the lifecycle costs to the public infrastructure and services have been calculated. The project somewhat builds on existing infrastructure, as it uses existing water and gas lines; however, it would require a short sewer line extension. The site plan proposes far more parking than required for every land use except the supermarket, which goes against the Regional Plan's recommendation to build a compact development pattern. The proposed project only somewhat complements existing and planned transportation options, for two reasons. First, as described in the previous paragraph, the proposed project lacks connected pedestrian and bike access. Second, the site plan includes only a sidewalk to connect the grocery store location with the stub of the Oconee Crossing neighborhood's existing road, Corporate Drive. Modifying this proposed connection to also include vehicular access via extension of Corporate Drive would have many benefits. It would better fulfill the Regional Plan's recommendation to complement existing transportation options, it would provide Oconee Crossing residents direct vehicular access to the grocery store and other facilities, and it would produce less potential traffic congestion on Hog Mountain Road/SR 53 by providing Oconee County residents with an alternate vehicular route. Reducing the number of parking spaces, adding bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and extending Corporate Drive to connect the neighborhood with the grocery store are all potential modifications that would bring the site plan more in line with the Regional Plan's recommendations.

Potential Interjurisdictional Impacts

The applicant states that the project is unlikely to affect any of the environmental quality factors identified on the DRI Additional Form, including water supply watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, protected mountain and river corridors, floodplains, historic resources, and other environmentally sensitive resources. An estimated 62% of the site would be covered in impervious surfaces, and two stormwater ponds are planned to manage stormwater runoff. The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) identifies zero wetlands

onsite and 166 wetland areas are located within one mile of the site. The Northeast Georgia Regional Plan's Conservation and Development Map (dated 7/19/2018) identifies zero acres of "Conservation" land onsite and 608 acres of "Conservation" land within one mile of the site. This "Conservation" land includes zero acres of Regionally Important Resource land onsite and 506 acres of RIR land within one mile of the site. This acreage is part of the Northeast Georgia Green Infrastructure Network as identified in the Northeast Georgia Resource Management Plan for Regionally Important Resources (dated 8/7/2018). No specific Regionally Important Resource sites are identified within one mile of the proposed site. The proposal should be designed to minimize disruption to the existing streams, associated wetlands, and floodplains to avoid future erosion, flooding, and degraded water quality onsite and downstream from the site. Low impact design measures, like bioswales, rain gardens, and other green infrastructure should be incorporated into the project design. At minimum, the project should be in accordance with the latest edition of the Georgia Stormwater Management Manual (Blue Book) and meet all relevant EPD requirements.

The applicant indicated that the project would generate 1,038 new peak hour trips. The development proposes access at six locations: two new full-access driveways on US 78 and SR 53, two new right-in and right-out accesses on US 78, and two existing accesses on US 78 and US 53 that would be shared with an existing restaurant. Traffic infrastructure improvements are proposed at the locations of the two new full-access driveways. For the full-access driveway on US 78, a traffic signal warrant analysis is proposed, with the traffic signal being installed at the developer's expense, if needed. The full-access driveway on US 53 is proposed to include turning lanes and a curb cut. To minimize potential new traffic congestion from the proposed development, it is essential to include multiple access points and infrastructure improvements like those proposed in the traffic study. Other recommendations that would help to minimize potential traffic congestion are described above, including adding sidewalks and bike amenities and extending Corporate Drive to provide vehicular access from the Oconee Crossing neighborhood.

The project would be served by the Oconee County water and sewer systems with an estimated daily demand of 0.045 MGD for each system. The applicant states that these demands can be covered by existing capacity. No water line extension is anticipated. The applicant states that a sewer line extension of 0.71 miles would be required to serve this project.

The applicant estimates that the project would be worth \$48.6 million at build-out in 2024 and generate \$3.5 million in annual local taxes. On a per-acre basis, the project would be worth approximately \$1.1 million and generate approximately \$82 thousand in tax revenue. Prior to approval, the County should measure the life cycle costs of the infrastructure needed to serve this project to ensure that they would not be committing to more maintenance expenses than the new tax revenue can cover.

Comments from Affected Parties

Christopher Hash, D1TO Traffic Operations Supervisor, Georgia Department of Transportation

Will require GDOT Coordination.

Unaware of any GDOT projects in the vicinity

Evaluate signal at SR 10 and SR 53

Perform intersection control evaluation (ICE) for proposed driveway at median break on US 78/SR 10. The right-out for this driveway is shown going to the shoulder?

First internal movement to be 150' minimum based on 750' lot depth

Driveway spacing is appropriate, but do we need three RIROs and a full access on SR 10?

DW #2 – Is this D/W necessary, will have safety issues with vehicles crossing 2 through lanes then go into U-turn lane.

On SR 10 right out need to stripe to thru lane edge line not rtl which gives the impression of “keep moving”. Proposed signal at D/W #1 will need to meet warrants. Is project being built out in stages? If so is the signal only warranted at the later stages?

Perform ICE for full proposed drive on SR 53

Recommend first internal movement for the proposed driveway on SR 53 be minimum 200'

Verify ISD for all driveways, especially proposed full access on SR 53 on inside of curve

Ensure left and right turn lanes have appropriate storage

Ensure widening transitions are smooth and of appropriate length